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FM AMCONSUL HERMOSILLO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1242
INFO RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 0353
RUEHXC/ALL US CONSULATES IN MEXICO COLLECTIVE
RUEHHO/AMCONSUL HERMOSILLO 1599

UNCLAS HERMOSILLO 000024

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [ALOW](#) [CASC](#) [MX](#)
SUBJECT: HERMOSILLO: MULTIPLE FAILURES LEAD TO PRISON BREAK

REF: UNCLASS 05 HERMOSILLO 350

¶1. (U) Summary: On January 15, at approximately 11:30 am, three highly dangerous prisoners broke out of the Centro de Readaptacion Social I (CERESO) (Center for Social Readaptation, i.e. prison) in Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico. For one of them, it was his third prison break in as many convictions. Governor Eduardo Bours Castelo responded immediately by firing the state director of the prison system, the prison director, and the subdirector. The state director told us that, under the circumstances, such firings are "normal" and that he expects to work for the governor again shortly. The three fugitives remain at large as public outcry intensifies over yet another security failure. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Of the many lapses in CERESO security making this escape possible, perhaps the most glaring is that the prisoners were kept in a minimum security temporary holding facility within the maximum security prison. They had been there since October, although current policy sets a maximum stay at seventy-two hours. However, rampant corruption has long overridden such guidelines. The former state prison director, Eusebio Pillado Hernandez, readily admitted to Consulate officials that prisoners could bribe their way into those more pleasant accommodations, where servants can even be hired. (The facility also houses a considerable convict population of ex-policemen, kept separate from ordinary prisoners for their safety.)

¶3. (U) In addition, one of the walls of the minimum security area was also an exterior wall of the prison itself. When a construction team left behind some tools, the prisoners allegedly stole them to poke a hole through the wall. A re-enactment of the event by a local newspaper claimed to show that it would have taken the prisoners no more than one minute, thirty-five seconds to create such a hole, since the unreinforced concrete block construction provides little obstacle. A chronic shortage of trained guards both within the prison and in the adjacent parking lot also contributed to the ease of the escape, as did housing prisoners together who were previous partners in crime. Newspaper reports claim that prison officials did not even notice the incident for approximately an hour.

¶4. (U) Two of the prisoners who escaped, Antonio Favela Ojeda and Arnulfo Lares Favela, are renowned for their kidnapping of two young women from prominent local families (Reftel). The third prisoner, Joel Emilio Sosa Lspez, had been charged with a murder outside a table dance club called Oops. Local newspapers report that Favela Ojeda is believed to be the mastermind, given his previous on-the-job-experience. He broke out of a prison in Baja California in the mid 1990s and from one in Culiacan, Sinaloa in 1997. Oops. Both of his earlier convictions were also for kidnapping.

¶5. (SBU) Post personnel met with Pillado Hernandez on January

18, the day after he was dismissed by the Governor. Pillado Hernandez, who was unexpectedly upbeat, asserted that no serious prison reforms had been carried out since 1949. He said that Governor Bours was personally very interested in prison issues and had given him responsibility to address them. Among the major problems faced by the system are corruption, inadequate food and medical attention, and sloppy record-keeping which (when combined with the aforementioned corruption) can even result in prisoners who are eligible for early release remaining behind bars if they cannot pay bribes. Pillado Hernandez said he had made some headway during his short tenure as state prison director but the remaining reform tasks are enormous. Post will report more fully on prison conditions in Sonora in the near future. There are currently 57 Americans in prisons within Sonora state.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Pillado Hernandez has been a reliable contact for post for the past ten years. He had been appointed as state prison director in October 2005. Before that, he had managed the state office of the Registro Civil, where he had implemented many innovations -- many involving computer technology -- that cut down on the fraudulent use of marriage and birth certificates. Indeed, he fired an employee who had colluded with two visa applicants after post brought the matter to his attention. A prominent young member of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), he described his three months as state prison director as the most "intense and personally satisfying professional experience of his life." He said his dismissal was not personal and that he expected to work with Governor Bours again. His substantial plans for prison modernization may be on hold. His interim replacement is Razl Chavez Acosta, a former lead investigator at the State Attorney General's office, the Procuradurma General de Justicia. Chavez Acosta has a somewhat dubious reputation. End Comment.

CLARKE